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INFERNO
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003 VARIANT EDITION
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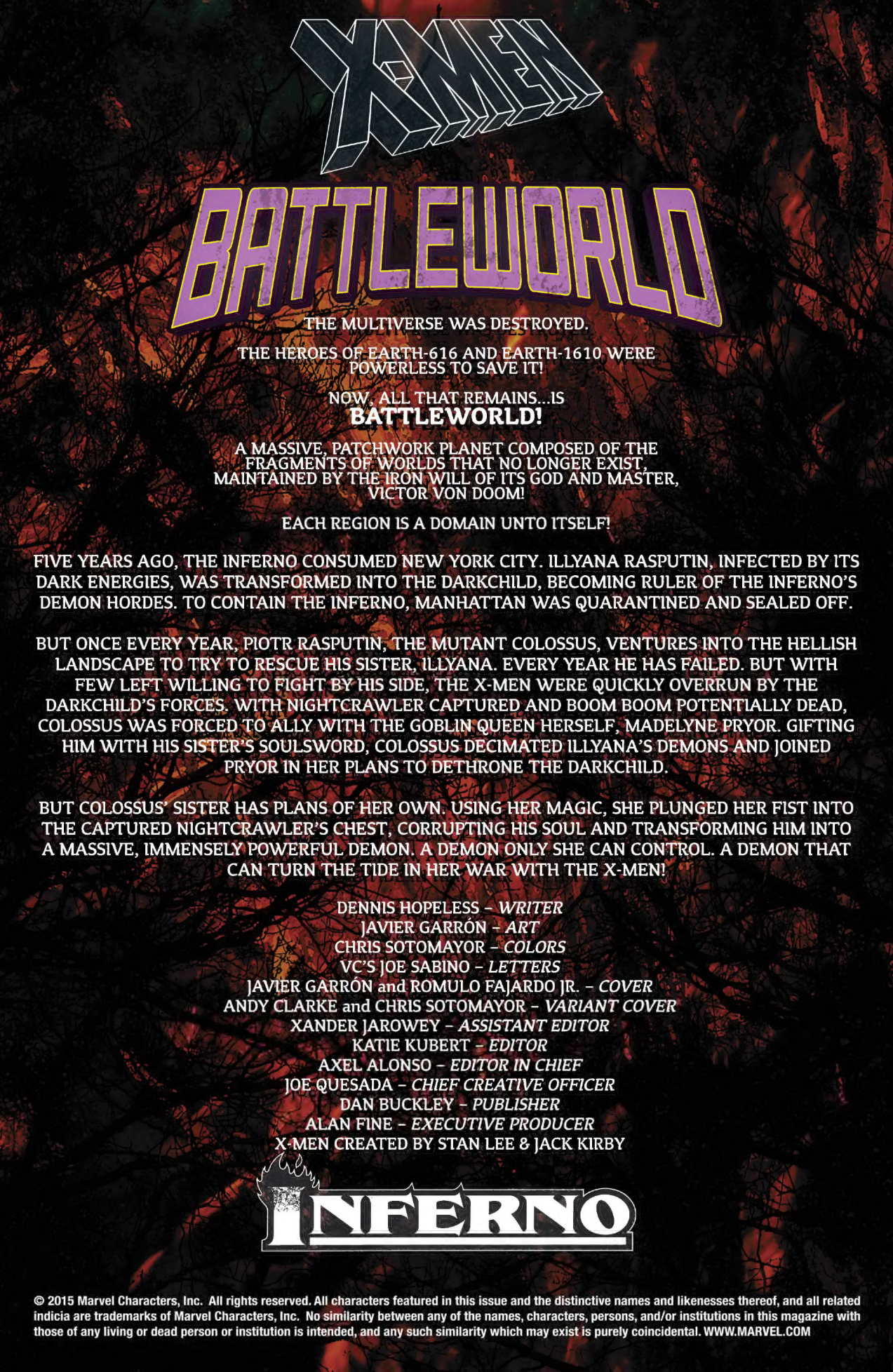
X-MEN
BATTLEWORLD
THE MULTIVERSE WAS DESTROYED.
THE HEROES OF EARTH-616 AND EARTH-1610 WERE POWERLESS TO SAVE IT!
NOW, ALL THAT REMAINS...IS
BATTLEWORLD!
A MASSIVE, PATCHWORK PLANET COMPOSED OF THE FRAGMENTS OF WORLDS THAT NO LONGER EXIST, MAINTAINED BY THE IRON WILL OF ITS GOD AND MASTER, VICTOR VON DOOM!
EACH REGION IS A DOMAIN UNTO ITSELF!
FIVE YEARS AGO, THE INFERNO CONSUMED NEW YORK CITY. ILLYANA RASPUTIN, INFECTED BY ITS DARK ENERGIES, WAS TRANSFORMED INTO THE DARKCHILD, BECOMING RULER OF THE INFERNO'S DEMON HORDES. TO CONTAIN THE INFERNO, MANHATTAN WAS QUARANTINED AND SEALED OFF.
BUT ONCE EVERY YEAR, PIOTR RASPUTIN, THE MUTANT COLOSSUS, VENTURES INTO THE HELLISH LANDSCAPE TO TRY TO RESCUE HIS SISTER, ILLYANA. EVERY YEAR HE HAS FAILED. BUT WITH FEW LEFT WILLING TO FIGHT BY HIS SIDE, THE X-MEN WERE QUICKLY OVERRUN BY THE DARKCHILD'S FORCES. WITH NIGHTCRAWLER CAPTURED AND BOOM BOOM POTENTIALLY DEAD, COLOSSUS WAS FORCED TO ALLY WITH THE GOBLIN QUEEN HERSELF, MADELYNE PRYOR. GIFTING HIM WITH HIS SISTER'S SOULSWORD, COLOSSUS DECIMATED ILLYANA'S DEMONS AND JOINED PRYOR IN HER PLANS TO DETHRONE THE DARKCHILD.
BUT COLOSSUS' SISTER HAS PLANS OF HER OWN. USING HER MAGIC, SHE PLUNGED HER FIST INTO THE CAPTURED NIGHTCRAWLER'S CHEST, CORRUPTING HIS SOUL AND TRANSFORMING HIM INTO A MASSIVE, IMMENSELY POWERFUL DEMON. A DEMON ONLY SHE CAN CONTROL. A DEMON THAT CAN TURN THE TIDE IN HER WAR WITH THE X-MEN!
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INFERNO

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LIMBO. ILLYANA'S LAIR...
I'VE BEEN HERE ONCE BEFORE.
ONE YEAR AGO, I SCRATCHED AND CLAWED MY WAY UP THIS TOWER.
I STOOD IN THIS VERY SPOT AND STARED AT THAT BLACK ONYX DOOR.
BUT THIS IS NOTHING LIKE LAST YEAR.
THERE ARE NO DEMONS LEFT TO SLAY. THIS BATTLE HAS ALREADY BEEN WON.
MY SISTER ILLYANA IS THROUGH THOSE DOORS.
ALL I HAVE LEFT TO DO--
--IS GO AND GET HER.
SMASH

WHAT IS THIS?!
WHERE IS SHE?!
WHERE IS ILLYANA?
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING AT, MADELYNE?
HA. OH, COLOSSUS...I WAS PLAYING AT WAR...
...BUT YOUR SISTER SEEMS TO BE PLAYING A DIFFERENT GAME.
WE JUST NEED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THAT IS EXACTLY.
I'LL KILL YOU! WE HAD A DEAL!
YOU GOTTA RELAX, BABE.
THIS ISN'T HER TRICK.
PRYOR WOULDN'T HAVE GONE TO ALL THE TROUBLE OF GIVING YOU THAT SOULSWORD IF SHE'D KNOWN ILLYANA WASN'T UP HERE.
SMART AND SEXY, COLOSSUS. DOMINO SEEMS LIKE A KEEPER.

TIME IS RUNNING OUT. WE NEED TO FIND ILLYANA AND GO.
A TASK THAT WILL BE MUCH HARDER IF YOU KEEP PICKING FIGHTS WITH OUR ONLY ALLIES.
CREEEK
I DON'T TRUST HER, NEENA.
WELL, OF COURSE YOU DON'T, PETE. SHE'S CLEARLY QUITE EVIL.
BUT WE'RE KIND OF IN HELL... WHERE OUR TEAM-UP OPTIONS ARE SEVERELY LIMITED.
I SUPPOSE.
WE ONLY HAVE TO TRUST HER A TINY BIT.
THINK OF HER AS A CONFIDENTIAL INFORMANT. SHE'S A PLAYER IN HERE. SHE KNOWS THE LAY OF THE LAND BETTER THAN WE EVER WILL AND--
ACTUALLY...
...I DON'T THINK THAT PARTICULAR EXPERTISE WILL BE OF MUCH HELP.
UNLESS MY EYES DECEIVE ME, YOUR DARLING SISTER...

X-HEADQUARTERS...

"...HAS FOUND HER WAY OVER TO *YOUR* NECK OF THE WOODS."

BAM!

HOLY.

HELL.

WHY IS EVERYONE JUST STANDING AROUND?
WE HAVE TO JOIN THIS FIGHT. WE HAVE TO LEAVE.
BABE...
...WE CAN'T.
HAHAHAHAHA!
ARE YOU NEW?
IF THERE'S SOME FORCE FIELD EXIT OF WHICH WE'RE UNAWARE, PLEASE, DO TELL.
BUT OTHERWISE, YOU'RE JUST ANOTHER FISH IN THE BOWL.
YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED...
...LITTLE SIS IS RIDING YOUR TELEPORTER AROUND OUT THERE LIKE A DONKEY.
NIGHTCRAWLER... NO...
PETE, WE'LL BE OKAY. WE WILL FIND A WAY OUT JUST LIKE WE ALWAYS DO.

YES, INDEED.
LOOK FOR THAT SILVER LINING.
SQUINT JUST A LITTLE AND WE ALL HAVE WHAT WE WANTED.
I GOT THE CATBIRD SEAT. WITH HAVOK AND MY SON NATHAN AT MY SIDE.
HEH, HEH.
AND YOU HELPED YOUR PRECIOUS LITTLE SNOWFLAKE OUT OF THE FIRE.
DON'T DO IT.
IF YOU ASK ME, THE DARKCHILD OVERPLAYED HER HAND.
IN HERE, IN LIMBO, SHE WAS LIKE A GOD--LEECHING POWER FROM THE FLAME AND COMMANDING EVERY DEMON IN THE PIT.
OUT THERE SHE'S JUST ANOTHER ANGRY FREAK RAGING AGAINST THE MUTANT MACHINE.
I WON'T BE SHOCKED IF SHE COMES RUNNING BACK IN AN HOUR WITH HER TAIL TUCKED.
THAT IS, OF COURSE...
...IF SAD LITTLE SCOTTIE SUMMERS--

"--HAS LEARNED HOW TO *WIN* A FIGHT."

BAMF

BAMF

BAMF

BAMF

BAMF

THIS *BAMF DRAGON* IS TEARING US APART, JEAN.

"BAMF DRAGON?"

I DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO *CALL* IT. IT'S FIGHTING LIKE A MONSTER VERSION OF *KURT*.

SCOTT...

...THAT *IS* KURT.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

WHAT *HAPPENED* TO HIM?!

"ILLYANA HAPPENED."
OH CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN.
IT WOULD BE AN HONOR TO SPEND THE NEXT SEVERAL MINUTES BEATING YOUR BRITISH BEEFCAKE INTO A QUIVERING PILE OF MAN MEAT.
TRY IT, DARKCHILD.
BUT, BRIAN, THAT WOULD BE AN IRRESPONSIBLE USE OF MY TIME AND ENERGY--
FOoooM
GAH!
ARRGGHHH!
BOY, THIS IS FUN.
HUARK
--PARTICULARLY WHEN ROGUE HERE SO CLEARLY WANTS A TURN.

TO ME, MY X-MEN!
THIS IS OUR LINE! RIGHT HERE!
WE HOLD IT!
WE PROTECT THAT FORCE FIELD WITH OUR LIVES!
I KNOW HOW IT LOOKS--
--BUT IF WE LOSE THIS, THE CITY BURNS.
SO WHATEVER YOU DO...
...DON'T LOSE!

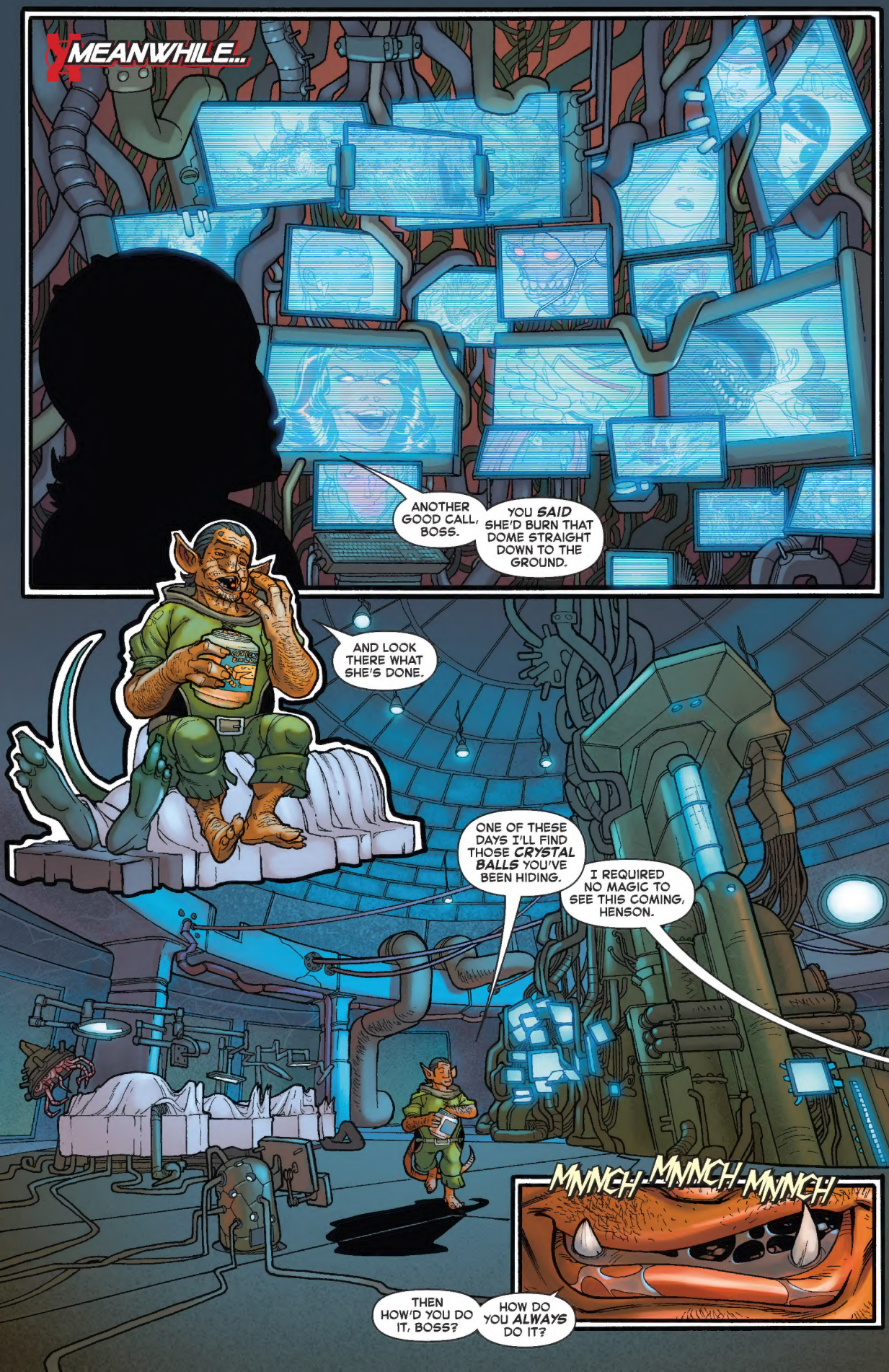
THEY'RE PUSHING THROUGH!
STAND YOUR GROUND!
CYCLOPS-- THE REINFORCEMENTS ARE HERE.
WHAT?
BROTHER VOODOO, NO!
NICO, VISION, BROO...YOU CAN'T ABANDON YOUR POSTS!
FORGE, YOU CAN'T BE OUT HERE. WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?
THINKING ABOUT TURNING THE TIDE, HELPING YOU ALL WIN THIS FIGHT.
YOU HAVE TO HOLD THE FORCE FIELD! WITH THE SCIENCE AND MAGIC TEAMS OUT HERE, IT COULD FALL AT ANY MOMENT!
HANK AND STRANGE CAN HOLD IT FOR A BIT.
GOOD GOD...
...WHERE'S ILLYANA?
SCOTT, IT'S FINE. THE PROTECTION SPELLS ARE STILL UP.
ILLYANA CAN'T TELEPORT INSIDE THE BUILDING.
NO. SHE CAN'T.

"BUT KURT CAN!"
GRAB YOUR STARRED GARTERS AND HOARY HOSTS, GENTLEMEN.
IT'S TIME TO TUSSLE.

WE'RE GONNA HAVE A QUICK LITTLE CHAT OUT HERE IN THE HALLWAY.
BE RIGHT BACK WITH YOU GUYS.
NEENA, WE DON'T HAVE *TIME* FOR THIS! WHAT ARE YOU--
NO TALKING, PETE.
TIME TO *LISTEN*.
WE ALL HAVE OUR CRAZY AND *YOURS* IS VERY SPECIFIC.
ILLYANA SITS AT THE TOP OF YOUR CHARTS EVERY SINGLE DAY NO MATTER WHAT'S GOING ON. NOBODY'S UNSEATING HER ANYTIME SOON. NOT EVEN ME.
NOW WAIT. I NEVER SAID--
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO SAY. I KNEW IT GOING IN. THAT'S YOU AND THAT'S DANDY.
BUT IT'S TIME TO LET UP THAT LASER FOCUS JUST A LITTLE BIT AND LOOK AROUND.
WE'RE STUCK BEHIND ENEMY LINES HERE. AND BY "*HERE*" I MEAN *HERE IN HELL*.
BOOMER IS MISSING. MAYBE *DEAD*.
NIGHTCRAWLER SWITCHED SIDES.
AND YOU KEEP TRYING TO LOP PEOPLE'S HEADS OFF AT THE SLIGHTEST PROVOCATION.
THERE'S NO PUNCHING OUR WAY OUT OF THIS ONE.
AND THESE ARE THE ONLY CREEPS IN HELL WHO DON'T CURRENTLY WANT US DEAD.
SO PLEASE... *EASE UP* A LITTLE.
I...
...OKAY. YOU ARE RIGHT.

I LOVE YOU. I'M HERE FOR YOU. WE'RE GONNA GET THROUGH THIS JUST FINE.
I JUST NEED YOU LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE.
PSST...
...HEY, GUYS. SORRY.
NOTHING WORSE THAN A POP-IN RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF GOOD FOREPLAY.
BUT, UH...
"...THERE'S BEEN A DEVELOPMENT."

THE FORCE FIELD! NO!
ILLYANA, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
IS IT NOT OBVIOUS, SCOTT?
I'VE WON.


MEANWHILE...
ANOTHER GOOD CALL, BOSS.
YOU SAID SHE'D BURN THAT DOME STRAIGHT DOWN TO THE GROUND.
AND LOOK THERE WHAT SHE'S DONE.
ONE OF THESE DAYS I'LL FIND THOSE CRYSTAL BALLS YOU'VE BEEN HIDING.
I REQUIRED NO MAGIC TO SEE THIS COMING, HENSON.
MNYNCH-MNYNCH-MNYNCH
THEN HOW'D YOU DO IT, BOSS?
HOW DO YOU ALWAYS DO IT?

WHIRRRRR
IT'S EASY TO KNOW HOW PUPPETS WILL DANCE...
...WHEN MISTER SINISTER HOLDS ALL THE STRINGS.
NEXT: A SINISTER PLOT REVEALED...